

TAPE I

Taped Interview with Tom Gibson

February 18, 1982.

K.T.: Can you just talk a bit about the wedding picture and tell what you were interested in when you were taking the picture

Tom: Well, this happen to be at a time when I was in New York wandering around looking for photographs, and I ended up in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, lookinh for photographs that stimulated me in some way, some sort of juxtapostion of people and that particular type of landscape. There seemed to be a fair amount of activity in the gardens at that time. There were people there looking at flower wandering around, lying on the grass. And then just as in Montreal where people tend to go to the botanical gardens for wedding photographs for photographs of a very formal occasion set in a somewhat magical landscape. I wasn't too i interested in getting that kind of photograph w where you have the wedding..the bride and groom set up against a natural landscape with all the guests around and then the photographer sort of sneaks up and makes some sort of commen on this rather ambiguous situation. The people were very animated. [It was a Puerto

Rican wedding and fairly animated. There was a fair amount of confusion going on. I wanted to get a little bit of that feeling. But at the same time I wanted to get something more coming into the photograph which really had nothing to do with the wedding. But It would create some sort of tension and the wedding becomes a background rather than a foreground. I saw this black guy who was observing the wedding. ~~at the time and we were both standing on a balustrade..there were steps looking down onto a lower level..~~ We were both standing on this platform area and he was placed in front of me so that he obscured some of the scene ~~that was going on behind.~~ And I thought that if I just wait here and shoot a couple of shots very close to him, he ~~is~~ would ~~going to hear this~~ click ~~behind him,~~ he'd ~~going to~~ turn around and look at me. And that's what I wanted to happen.] I wanted him to look at me taking the photograph and then he becomes central to the photograph. in a way. And with this thing going on behind, the wedding, [There's a sort of funny thing, a sort of juxtaposition of planes that takes place and I could see that through the viewfinder because of the different levels. It made people who weren't that far away look as though they were far away and much more diminutive. And I thought that was sort of an interesting thing to get in a photograph, ~~to get~~ ^{to get}

that difference in scale, that feeling of scale that changed, one of the very formal things that photographers deal with.] So, he turned around and the feeling I got when he turned around wasn't really one of surprise; it was more a feeling of aggression. It was more like what the fuck are you doing? You know. I guess it was understandable to take a photograph of the wedding but why take a photograph of him. It was obvious that he was going to be in the photograph. Does that answer the question?

K.T. T.V. What about the source of interest in the picture in Toronto?

T.G. ~~Oh, this one here.~~ You know at certain times of the year you get a ~~certain type of~~ light which is quite interesting. ~~You know it's~~ ^{was} A very harsh type of light. This ~~happens to be~~ fall, ~~It was quite~~ a sunny day when the light reflects off the sidewalk ^{and} off the buildings. ~~and I find that~~ For me it's quite a seductive light. ^{Then, sometimes} ~~to photograph in.~~ Also I tend to look for situations where there's a certain amount of clutter and ~~there's also a~~ ~~certain amount of~~ confusion, going on. Buildings that you can't necessarily identify; ~~architectu~~ ~~rally they're not very interesting buildings~~ and they usually in a much more ~~xxxx~~ working class area of the city. And the people.. well

I can't say that they're much more interesting, that isn't necessarily true. But there is a certain harshness to the life that you can feel; the way people dress, the expressions, the way they walk, the way they huddle up in the cold and so on. I like photographs where there's a lot of visual confusion in the work and you have to search for what is central, for what is interesting in the work, because it's all lost in there, in this confusion. So in this particular area, you had a lot of telephoto wires and stuff like that. It's not a designed environment; it's much nicer..it has a more organic feeling about it. I guess that's what I like certain parts of the city that are like that, more organic than design. Anyway I saw this man with a wool jacket with a pheasant knitted into the design. And I thought that that looked sort of interesting in this urban environment, that you have the design of a pheasant flying off into the air. It has something to do with something that people think is a much more pleasant environment to be in. And ~~just~~ just at that moment a girl came walking towards me at a very fast pace, a very sprightly walk and her hair was bouncing up and down and I very quickly noticed that she had elephants on her sweater. And I just thought the juxtaposition of the elephants and the pheasant within that location, was, for me, quite interesting. And I just placed myself. ah

to try and get her coming into the frame on the left hand side and the man more towards the right and these telephone wires coming right down the middle. So you weren't too sure exactly what I was photographing. I guess it's a sort of compositional problem; you get tired of things being placed all in the centre of the photograph or all in one side. Just trying to spread out the information. And I guess that's what interests me in photographs, is the information that you try to get as clearly reproduced as possible.

K.T. Why are things like visual confusion and tension important to you?

T.G. I guess because I get bored with things that are simple. If they're too simple, they aren't as intriguing for the most part. They can be seductive but after a while they just don't stimulate me enough..

K.T. Is that why you take pictures in the city mainly?

T.G. Well, ya. That's one of the reasons; the city offers that kind of confusion. You have a great number of elements working within a contained environment, you know, and working towards different ends, for different reasons.

But I would say that I like to photograph in the city ~~for~~ partly because that's where I am most of the time. Also I don't think that cities are natural environments for any kind of animal including humans. But that's what makes cities more interesting because that's what makes people interesting because you're stuck in this environment constantly.

K.T. Is that something you try and get across in the photographs?

T.G. I don't know about try to get across. I don't think about it in that way. But I think that that comes across in the photographs. It's also a bit of a game; you try to set up problems for yourself and stimulate your own curiosity about what things are going to look like in the photograph. If you put that person over there and this over here, what's that going to look like? It's the same problems that say painters have when they're trying to break up a canvas in some way. They would be completely bored with something that's always happening right in the middle, so it starts to lose its challenge. So you want to start pushing things over this way or over that way, break up the space, get some sort of ambiguity in the space so you can't tell what's in front of this. You know, everything's on the same plane being a two dimensional surface.

You know half the time to be quite honest, I don't know what the hell I'm doing. You know, why, you know...except if you like the activity of walking around and looking, ah. Trying to make some sort of sense, a visual sense not trying to understand it from a social point of view ah, visually sensible.

K.T. Well, when people looked at the photograph they usually found the photograph of Asilomar acceptable, but they don't find the other ones acceptable. Why do you think they don't?

T.G. Well, I think that's a very pleasing photograph. It's in no way offensive. It's a beautiful location, it's a beautiful tree. The composition is very nice purely from a graphic sense. There are no tensions, it doesn't have this confusion. It lacks a certain ambiguity. I think people like to read it on that level. It has a graphic seductiveness. You don't have to think about it. Not that you have to think about these things; but they do pose a question, you know, why the hell would you photograph that.

K.T. Would you characterize, say this photograph from Toronto, as just another day?

T.G. Just another day. Which one any of these photographs. Somebody else says that right, it's just another day. Well I suppose that in a way

it is . I suppose if you stack them up together, they all look pretty much the same ..there's not too much difference. I'm not too sure what that really means

K.T. I meant it as.. well if you make a comparison between the Asilomar picture and the ones which are taken in a more urban area..

T.G. Oh, I see. Ya, that's a good point. I think that the Asilomar picture of the tree I think that's a foreign location, it's not what they see everyday unless they live there. It's looks pleasant. Whereas people looking at photographs of the city, it just looks like what they see everyday and they want to get away from that. And so they want a very brief escape into that photograph for a second and it looks nice and I'd like to be there.

K.T. But in some way some of the other ones in the city are as well. For example the one of the majorettes.

T.G. Well that's a sort of . That's a funny photograph. That's a type of event that you only get in large cities, you know this parade and excitement, and costumes and performance. It's like street theatre. Parade and majorettes and all that kind of thing. But the other thing abo

about that photograph, it's not just the subject matter, but that wonderful light that's falling on the people that are being photographed. That to me is very seductive and pleasant. The quality of the light.

K.T. O.K. I just have one more question. What photographers in Quebec do you think are important today?

T.G. Hum. Well I think that there's a few photographers that are important. Say Sam Tata. I think he's an important photographer and that primarily because he's been doing it for such a long time. I guess you gain importance the longer you do it. I suppose that means you're serious about what you're doing. And you're not just looking at a photograph taken today or last week but you're looking at history, photographs that go back over a long period of time. And how he was dealing with the problems and things essentially haven't changed that much so he's dealing with the same problems I'm dealing with. More?

K.T. No that's o.k.

FIN



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A7

Edm: file in R.
Position - not to sit - sit
eye glasses - open file - place paper
left - water - fold hands - speak

(1st - intussus - sandwich glasses on!)
+ drink water to 1/2, 7/8 to 3/4

1.)

2nd + 3rd within enter

Read, look at left

Open file - write page script



Glass near empty, pitcher 3/4 full

~~glasses~~ glasses on!!

Pen in hand at other mouth

left hand on left arm, R. elbow on R. arm

FROM WHAT
HAS JUST
BEEN SAID,

INSEMINATION OF WOMEN

THIS

ingratitude -

SEPARATION OF
GENETICS & GESTATION

fine
1/4
Dad, Mom, then come
to sale of babies / large
numbers.

WITH ITS NEW COMMERCIAL
APPLICATION
USED TO BE THE STUFF OF SCIENCE FICTION

DOES THIS KIND OF ADVANCED
TECHNOLOGY -

Mr. Robert Jones
Dr. + Mrs.
James
Mrs. Carol Jones